

13 April 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH : Deputy Director for Intelligence /s/ JCS

SUBJECT : Views on Public Release of Information  
on US Satellite Reconnaissance

1. This memorandum is for your information. It presents my views on the current proposal to release some KH photographs of Soviet and Chinese strategic missile installations in order to gain support for the Administration's defense programs.

2. You should note that this proposal is quite different from those of recent years. For example, in 1967 when USIB considered the classification of KH material its discussions were in terms of taking some aspects of the program out of the special security compartment and not in terms of declassification. Specifically, the USIB recommended that the fact of a US satellite photographic reconnaissance program be acknowledged at the SECRET level and that intelligence derived from the exploitation of the photography (but not the film itself) be used in SECRET or TOP SECRET publications with the identification of the source as satellite photography. As you will remember, USIB approved these recommendations but they were never implemented because of Secretary McNamara's objection.

3. A primary factor which should be considered is the Soviet attitude toward discussions of satellite reconnaissance. The attached memorandum from [REDACTED] points out that

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a responsible Soviet diplomat at the UN said that the USSR would not acknowledge the fact of Soviet and US programs publicly and urged that the US not do so. This Soviet position was in the context of peaceful uses of outer space. If the Administration surfaced KH photography in support of more funds for the Safeguard or MIRV programs, I am certain that the Soviets would denounce such use of photography as evidence of our lack of sincerity with respect to SALT and might well break off the talks. Those in the USSR who have opposed SALT would seize upon our action as evidence of their previous position. Those who have supported SALT might agree and certainly would consider it as evidence of our lack of understanding of Soviet sensitivities.

4. I question whether surfacing KH photography in support of Safeguard and MIRV would generate much additional support in Congress. Few of those who oppose these programs doubt the existence of SS-9's although some might be influenced by the photography of the large Chinese launch facility. If the Administration wishes to use the photographs to influence Congress directly, it could do so in restricted session. Public release presumably would be used to generate support from the press and the American public and in turn to influence Congress. Even if the immediate objective of Congressional approval were attained, a precedent would have been established. It is unlikely that we would be able to maintain any security restrictions on KH material after such a release.

5. In sum, my view is that although some immediate benefits to the Administration might be derived from public release of KH photography, these benefits would be more than offset by a severe reaction from the USSR, by the disruption of SALT, and by the possibility that any arms limitation discussion with the Soviets could not be reactivated for several years.

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EDWARD W. PROCTOR

Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachment:

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Memorandum from

Subject: Views on Public Release of Information  
on US Satellite Reconnaissance

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SENSITIVE

2 April 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT : Soviet Sensitivity to Publicity  
on Satellite Reconnaissance

1. The most direct Soviet statement on the subject of acknowledging satellite reconnaissance was made in December 1969 by a diplomat at the UN, Mendeleovich, in a conversation with Buffum of the US Mission. In the context of peaceful uses of outer space, Mendeleovich opposed a US draft resolution because, among other things, it formally raised the fact that at least one superpower is photographing "secrets" of other states. Although Mendeleovich said that Soviet and US activities in this field were well known, the USSR would not acknowledge this fact publicly, and thought it would be an error for the US to do so, and urged us to desist from our resolution.

2. Apart from this conversation, the record of private Soviet statements on the subject of satellite reconnaissance reveals two things: (1) the Soviets simply have had very little to say on the matter; and (2) when they have, they have either been boastful (as Khrushchev was) or highly elliptical.

3. On at least two occasions in 1964, Khrushchev raised the issue of satellite reconnaissance with Western officials. Both times, Khrushchev's primary motive was to relay to the US that it should call off its reconnaissance overflights of Cuba and rely instead on satellite photography. On the first occasion, he even offered to exchange photographs of military installations with Washington.

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4. Since Khrushchev, however, the Soviets have been relatively reserved in private. In 1966, Ambassador Goldberg reported, in his talks with Soviet diplomats at the UN, he got the impression that they thought that open discussion of the matter might be damaging.

5. More recently, at Helsinki, the Soviets regularly shied away from the subject. They did, of course, refer to national means of verification and occasionally gestured overhead, but they did not raise the matter specifically in formal discussion. One delegate, Shchukin, mentioned the word "satellite" twice in technical discussions about verification. Otherwise, the Soviets behaved as though an explicit acknowledgment of this activity -- even in secret negotiations -- would be injurious.

6. It is interesting to note that references to satellite reconnaissance in Soviet propaganda have ceased since the Helsinki talks got underway. Prior to that time, there were occasional mentions of US launchings of "spy satellites" and of American scientific developments in this field. Long ago, however, Moscow dropped its charges that satellite reconnaissance violated international law.

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Chief, European Division, OCI